MAUDE: *Prose & Verse*

MAUDE: Prose & Verse *by* Christina Rossetti; 1850

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Prefatory Note

THIS "Tale for Girls" (as I should be disposed to call it) was written out by Christina Rossetti, with her usual excessive neatness of caligraphy, in 1850. I suppose it may have been composed in that year, or a year or two earlier. In 1850, up to the 5th December, she was nineteen years of age. Of the rather numerous poems interspersed in the tale, all save two have, I think, been published ere now. They were all written without any intention of inserting them in any tale—except only

the first two in the trio bouts-rimés sonnets. The MS. of the tale presents a few slight revisions, made at some much later date—perhaps about 1870, or 1875.

I daresay that Christina may, towards 1850, have offered the tale here or there for publication, but have no particular recollection as to that point. In now at last publishing it, I am not under any misapprehension regarding the degree of merit which it possesses. I allow it to be in all senses a juvenile performance; but I think it is agreeably written, and not without touches of genuine perception and discernment. Most of the poems I rate high. The literary reputation of Christina Rossetti is now

sufficiently established to make what she wrote interesting to many persons—if not for the writing's own sake, then for the writer's. As such, I feel no qualms in giving publicity to *Maude*.

It appears to me that my sister's main object in delineating Maude was to exhibit what she regarded as defects in her own character, and in her attitude towards her social circle and her religious obligations. Maude's constantly weak health is also susceptible of a personal reference, no doubt intentional: even so minor a point as her designing the pattern of a sofa-pillow might apply to Christina herself. Maude is made the subject of many unfavourable comments, from

herself and from her strict-minded authoress. The worst harm she appears to have done is, that when she had written a good poem, she felt it to be good. She was also guilty of the grave sin of preferring to forego the receiving of the eucharist when she supposed herself to be unworthy of it; and further, of attending the musical services at St. Andrew's Church (Wells Street, Oxford Street), instead of invariably frequenting her parish church. If some readers opine that all this shows Christina Rossetti's mind to have been at that date overburdened with conscientious scruples of an extreme and even a wire-drawn kind, I share their opinion. One can trace in this tale that

she was already an adherent of the advanced High Church party in the Anglican communion, including conventual sisterhoods. So far as my own views of right and wrong go, I cannot see that the much-reprehended Maude commits a single serious fault from title-page to finis.

I fancy that Agnes and Mary Clifton may be, to some extent, limned from two young ladies, Alicia and Priscilla Townsend, whom my sister knew and liked in those years. The whole family emigrated—perhaps a year or two prior to 1850—to Canterbury Settlement, New Zealand. Some surnames introduced into the tale—such as Hunt, Deverall, and Potter—were highly

familiar in our household. Towards the close is a sentence, "The locked book she never opened, but had it placed in Maude's coffin"; which is curious, as an unconscious prefigurement of a well-known and much-discussed incident in the life of Dante Gabriel Rossetti.

With these few remarks I commit *Maude* to the reader. For its prose the "indulgent reader" (as our great-grandfathers used to phrase it) may be in requisition; for its verse the "discreet" reader will suffice.

W. M. ROSSETTI.

LONDON, November, 1896.

Maude

Part I

I

"A PENNY for your thoughts," said Mrs. Foster, one bright July morning, as she entered the sitting-room, with a bunch of roses in her hand, and an open letter: "A penny for your thoughts," said she, addressing her daughter, who, surrounded by a chaos of stationery, was slipping out of sight some scrawled paper. This observation remaining unanswered, the mother, only too much accustomed to inattention, con-

tinued: "Here is a note from your Aunt Letty; she wants us to go and pass a few days with them. You know, Tuesday is Mary's birthday, so they mean to have some young people, and cannot dispense with your company."

"Do you think of going?" said Maude at last, having locked her writing-book.

"Yes, dear; even a short stay in the country may do you good, you have looked so pale lately. Don't you feel quite well? tell me."

"Oh yes; there is not much the matter, only I am tired and have a headache. Indeed there is nothing at all the matter; besides, the country may work wonders."

Half satisfied, half uneasy, Mrs. Foster asked a few more questions, to have them all answered in the same style: vain questions, put to one who, without telling lies, was determined not to tell the truth.

When once more alone, Maude resumed the occupation which her mother's entrance had interrupted. Her writing-book was neither commonplace-book, album, scrap-book, nor diary; it was a compound of all these, and contained original compositions not intended for the public eye, pet extracts, extraordinary little sketches, and occasional tracts of journal. This choice collection she now proceeded to enrich with the following sonnet:

Yes, I too could face death and never shrink:
But it is harder to bear hated life;
To strive with hands and knees weary of strife;
To drag the heavy chain whose every link
Galls to the bone; to stand upon the brink
Of the deep grave, nor drowse, though it be rife
With sleep; to hold with steady hand the knife,
Nor strike home: this is courage, as I think.
Surely to suffer is more than to do:
To do is quickly done; to suffer is
Longer and fuller of heart-sicknesses;
Each day's experience testifies of this:
Good deeds are many, but good lives are few;
Thousands taste the full cup; who drains the lees?

having done which she yawned, leaned back in her chair, and wondered how she should fill the time till dinner.

Maude Foster was just fifteen. Small, though not positively short, she might easily be overlooked, but would not easily be forgotten. Her figure was slight and well-made, but appeared almost high-shouldered through a habitual shrugging stoop. Her features were regular and pleasing; as a child she had been very pretty, and might have continued so but for a fixed paleness, and an expression, not exactly of pain, but languid and preoccupied to a painful degree. Yet even now if at any time she became thoroughly aroused

and interested, her sleepy eyes would light up with wonderful brilliancy, her cheeks glow with warm colour, her manner become animated, and drawing herself up to her full height, she would look more beautiful than ever she did as a child. So Mrs. Foster said, and so unhappily Maude knew. She also knew that people thought her clever, and that her little copies of verses were handed about and admired. Touching these same verses, it was the amazement of every one what could make her poetry so broken-hearted, as was mostly the case. Some pronounced that she wrote very foolishly about things she could not possibly understand; some wondered if she really had any secret

source of uneasiness; while some simply set her down as affected. Perhaps there was a degree of truth in all these opinions. But I have said enough: the following pages will enable my readers to form their own estimate of Maude's character. Meanwhile let me transport them to another sitting-room; but this time it will be in the country, with a delightful garden look-out.

Mary Clifton was arranging her mother's special nosegay when that lady entered.

"Here, my dear, I will finish doing the flowers. It is time for you to go and meet your aunt and cousin; indeed, if you do not make haste, you will be too late."

"Thank you, mamma; the flowers are nearly done"; and Mary ran out of the room.

Before long she and her sister were hurrying beneath a burning sun towards the railway station. Through having delayed their start to the very last moment, neither had found time to lay hands on a parasol; but this was little heeded by two healthy girls, full of life and spirits, and longing moreover to spy out their friends. Mary wanted one day of fifteen; Agnes was almost a year older: both were well-grown and well-made, with fair hair, blue eyes, and fresh complexions. So far they were alike: what differences existed in other respects remains to be seen.

"How do you do, aunt? How do you do, Maude?" cried Mary, making a sudden dart forward as she discovered our friends, who, having left the station, had already made some progress along the dusty road. Then relinquishing her aunt to Agnes, she seized upon her cousin, and was soon deep in the description of all the pleasures planned for the auspicious morrow.

"We are to do what we like in the morning: I mean, nothing particular is arranged; so I shall initiate you into all the mysteries of the place; all the cats, dogs, rabbits, pigeons, etc.; above all I must introduce you to a pig, a special protégé of mine: that is, if you are inclined, for you

look wretchedly pale; are n't you well, dear? "

"Oh yes, quite well, and you must show me everything. But what are we to do afterwards? "

"Oh! afterwards we are to be intensely grand. All our young friends are coming and we are to play at round games (you were always clever at round games), and I expect to have great fun. Besides, I have stipulated for unlimited strawberries and cream; also, sundry tarts are in course of preparation. By the way, I count on your introducing some new games among us benighted rustics; you who come from dissipated London."

"I fear I know nothing new, but

will do my best. At any rate I can preside at your toilet and assist in making you irresistible."

Mary coloured and laughed; then thought no more of the pretty speech, which sounded as if carefully prepared by her polite cousin. The two made a strong contrast: one was occupied by a thousand shifting thoughts of herself, her friends, her plans, what she must do, what she would do; the other, whatever might employ her tongue, and to a certain extent her mind, had always an undercurrent of thought intent upon herself.

Arrived at the house, greetings were duly and cordially performed; also an introduction to a new and

very fat baby, who received Maude's advances with a howl of intense dismay. The first day of a visit is often no very lively affair; so perhaps all parties heard the clock announce bedtime without much regret.

II

THE young people were assembled in Mary's room, deep in the mysteries of the toilet.

"Here is your wreath, Maude; you must wear it for my sake, and forgive a surreptitious sprig of bay which I have introduced," said Agnes, adjusting the last white rose, and looking affectionately at her sister and cousin.

Maude was arranging Mary's long fair hair with good-natured anxiety to display it to the utmost advantage.

"One more spray of fuchsia; I

was always sure fuchsia would make a beautiful head-dress. There; now you are perfection: only look; look Agnes. Oh, I beg your pardon; thank you; my wreath is very nice, only I have not earned the bay." Still she did not remove it; and when placed on her hair it well became the really intellectual character of her face. Her dress was entirely white; simple and elegant. Neither she nor Agnes would wear ornaments, but left them to Mary, in whose honour the entertainment was given, and who in all other respects was arrayed like her sister.

In the drawing-room Mary proceeded to set in order the presents received that morning; a handsomely

bound Bible from her father, and a small prayer-book with cross and clasp from her mother; a bracelet of Maude's hair from her aunt; a cornelian heart from Agnes, and a pocket-bonbonnière from her cousin, besides pretty trifles from her little brothers. In the midst of arrangements and re-arrangements, the servant entered with a large bunch of lilies from the village school-children, and the announcement that Mr. and Mrs. Savage were just arrived with their six daughters.

Gradually the guests assembled, young and old, pretty and plain; all alike seemingly bent on enjoying themselves; some with gifts, and all with cordial greetings for Mary; for

she was a general favourite. There was slim Rosanna Hunt, her scarf arranged with artful negligence to hide a slight protrusion of one shoulder; and sweet Magdalen Ellis habited as usual in quiet colours. Then came Jane and Alice Deverall, twins so much alike that few besides their parents knew them apart with any certainty; and their fair brother Alexis, who, had he been a girl, would have increased the confusion. There was little Ellen Potter, with a round rosy face like an apple, looking as natural and good-humoured as if, instead of a grand French governess, she had had her own parents with her like most of the other children; and then came three rather

haughty-looking Miss Stantons; and pale Hannah Lindley, the orphan; and Harriet Eyre, a thought too showy in her dress.

Mary, all life and spirits, hastened to introduce the new-comers to Maude; who, perfectly unembarrassed, bowed and uttered little speeches with the manner of a practised woman of the world; while the genuine, unobstrusive courtesy of Agnes did more towards making their guests comfortable than the eager good nature of her sister, or the correct breeding of her cousin.

At length the preliminaries were all accomplished, every one having found a seat, or being otherwise satisfactorily disposed of. The

elders of the party were grouped here and there talking and looking on: the very small children were accommodated in an adjoining apartment with a gigantic Noah's ark: and the rest of the young people being at liberty to amuse themselves as fancy might prompt, a general appeal was made to Miss Foster for some game, novel, entertaining, and ingenious; or, as some of the more diffident hinted, easy.

"I really know nothing new," said Maude: "you must have played at Proverbs, What's my thought like? How do you like it? and Magic music:—or stay, there is one thing we can try:—bouts-rimés."

"What?" asked Mary.

"Bouts-rimés: it is very easy. Some one gives rhymes, mamma can do that, and then every one fills them up as they think fit. A sonnet is the best form to select; but, if you wish, we could try eight, or even four lines."

"But I am certain I could not make a couplet," said Mary, laughing. "Of course you would get on capitally, and Agnes might manage very well, and Magdalen can do anything; but it is quite beyond me: do pray think of something more suited to my capacity."

"Indeed I have nothing else to propose. This is very much better than mere common games; but if you will not try it, that ends the

matter": and Maude leaned back in her chair.

"I hope"—began Mary; but Agnes interposed:

"Suppose some of us attempt bouts-rimés, and you meanwhile can settle what we shall do afterwards. Who is ready to test her poetical powers?—What, no one?—Oh, Magdalen, pray join Maude and me."

This proposal met with universal approbation, and the three girls retreated to a side table; Mary, who supplied the rhymes, exacting a promise that only one sonnet should be composed. Before the next game was fixed upon, the three following productions were submitted for judgment to the discerning public. The first was by Agnes.

Would that I were a turnip white,
Or raven black,
Or miserable hack
Dragging a cab from left to right;
Or would I were the showman of a sight,
Or weary donkey with a laden back,
Or racer in a sack,
Or freezing traveller on an Alpine height;
Or would I were straw-catching as I drown,
(A wretched landsman I, who cannot swim),
Or watching a lone vessel sink,
Rather than writing: I would change my pink
Gauze for a hideous yellow satin gown
With deep-cut scolloped edges and a rim.

"Indeed I had no idea of the sacrifice you were making," observed Maude; you did it with such heroic equanimity. Might I, however, venture to hint that my sympathy with your sorrows would have been greater, had they been expressed in metre?"

"There's gratitude for you," cried Agnes gaily: "What have you to expect, Magdalen?" and she went on to read her friend's sonnet:

I fancy the good fairies dressed in white,
Glancing like moonbeams through the shadows black;
Without much work to do for king or hack.
Training perhaps some twisted branch aright;
Or sweeping faded autumn leaves from sight,

To foster embryo life; or binding back
Stray tendrils; or in ample bean-pod sack
Bringing wild honey from the rocky height;
Or fishing for a fly lest it should drown;
Or teaching water-lily heads to swim,
Fearful that sudden rain might make them sink;
Or dyeing the pale rose a warmer pink;
Or wrapping lilies in their leafy gown,
Yet letting the white peep beyond the rim.—

"Well, Maude?"

"Well, Agnes; Miss Ellis is too kind to feel gratified at hearing that her verses make me tremble for my own: but such as they are, listen:

"Some ladies dress in muslin full and white,
Some gentlemen in cloth succinct and black;

Some patronise a dog-cart, some a hack,
Some think a painted clarence only right.
Youth is not always such a pleasing sight,
Witness a man with tassels on his back;
Or woman in a great-coat like a sack
Towering above her sex with horrid height.
If all the world were water fit to drown
There are some whom you would not teach to swim,
Rather enjoying if you saw them sink;
Certain old ladies dressed in girlish pink,
With roses and geraniums on their gowns:—
Go to the Basin, poke them o'er the rim.

"What a very odd sonnet": said Mary after a slight pause: but surely men don't wear tassels."

Her cousin smiled: "You must allow for poetical licence; and I have literally seen a man in Regent Street wearing a sort of hooded cloak with one tassel. Of course every one will understand the basin to mean the one in St. James's Park."

"With these explanations your sonnet is comprehensible," said Mary: and Magdalen added with unaffected pleasure: "And without them it was by far the best of the three."

Maude now exerted herself to amuse the party; and soon proved that ability was not lacking. Game after game was proposed and played at; and her fund seemed inexhaustible, for nothing was thought too

nonsensical or too noisy for the occasion. Her good humour and animation were infectious. Miss Stanton incurred forfeits with the blandest smile; Hannah Lindley blushed and dimpled as she had not done for many months; Rosanna never perceived the derangement of her scarf; little Ellen exulted in freedom from schoolroom trammels; the twins guessed each other's thoughts with marvellous facility; Magdalen laughed aloud; and even Harriet Eyre's dress looked scarcely too gay for such an entertainment. Well was it for Mrs. Clifton that the strawberries, cream, and tarts had been supplied with no niggard hand: and very meagre was the remnant left when the party broke up at a late hour.

III

AGNES and Mary were discussing the pleasures of the preceeding evening as they sat over the unusually late breakfast, when Maude joined them. Salutations being exchanged and refreshments supplied to the last comer, the conversation was renewed.

"Who did you think was the prettiest girl in the room last night? our charming selves, of course, excepted," asked Mary; "Agnes and I cannot agree on this point."

"Yes," said her sister, "we quite agree as to mere prettiness, only I

maintain that Magdalen is infinitely more attractive than half the handsome people one sees. There is so much sense in her face, and such sweetness. Besides, her eyes are really beautiful."

"Miss Ellis has a characteristic countenance, but she appeared to me very far from the belle of the evening. Rosanna Hunt has much more regular features."

"Surely you do n't think Rosanna prettier than Jane and Alice," interrupted Mary; "I suppose I never look at those two without fresh pleasure."

"They have good fair complexions, eyes, and hair, certainly"; and Maude glanced rather pointedly at

her unconscious cousin: "but to me they have a wax-dollish air which is quite unpleasant. I think one of the handsomest faces in the room was Miss Stanton's."

"But she has such a disagreeable expression," rejoined Mary hastily: then colouring she half turned towards her sister, who looked grave, but did not speak.

A pause ensued; and then Agnes said, "I remember how prejudiced I felt against Miss Stanton when first she came to live here, for her appearance and manners are certainly unattractive: and how ashamed of myself I was when we heard that last year, through all the bitterly cold weather, she rose at six, though she never has

a fire in her room, that she might have time before breakfast to make clothes for some of the poorest people in the village. And in the spring, when the scarlet fever was about, her mother would not let her go near the sick children for fear of contagion; so she saved up all her pocket-money to buy wine and soup and such things for them as they recovered."

"I daresay she is very good"; said Maude: "but that does not make her pleasing. Besides, the whole family have that disagreeable expression, and I suppose they are not all paragons. But you have both finished breakfast, and make me ashamed by your diligence. What is that beautiful piece of work?"

The sisters looked delighted. "I am so glad you like it, dear Maude. Mary and I are embroidering a cover for the lectern in our church; but we feared you might think the ground dull."

"Not at all; I prefer those quiet shades. Why, how well you do it: is it not very difficult? — Let me see if I understand the devices. There is the cross and the crown of thorns; and those must be the keys of St. Peter, with, of course, the sword of St. Paul. Do the flowers mean anything?"

"I am the Rose of Sharon and the Lily of the Valley," answered Agnes pointing: "That is balm of Gilead, at least it is what we call so; there

are myrrh and hyssop, and that is a palm-branch. The border is to be vine-leaves and grapes; with fig-leaves at the corners, thanks to Mary's suggestions. Would you like to help us? there is plenty of room at the frame."

"No, I should not do it well enough, and have not time to learn, as we go home to-morrow. How I envy you"; she continued in a low voice, as if speaking rather to herself than to her hearers: "you who live in the country, and are exactly what you appear, and never wish for what you do not possess. I am sick of display and poetry and acting."

"You do not act," replied Agnes warmly; "I never knew a more sin-

cere person. One difference between us is that you are less healthy and far more clever than I am. And this reminds me. Miss Savage begged me to ask you for some verses to put in her album. Would you be so very obliging? Any that you have by you would do."

"She can have the sonnet I wrote last night."

Agnes hesitated: "I could not well offer her that, because—"

"Why, she does not tower. Oh! I suppose she has some reprehensible old lady in her family, and so might feel hurt at my Lynch law. I will find you something else then, before I go."

And that evening, when Agnes

went to her cousin's room to help her in packing, Maude consigned to her a neat copy of the following lines:

She sat and sang alway
By the green margin of a stream,
Watching the fishes leap and play
Beneath the glad sunbeam.

I sat and wept alway
Beneath the moon's most shadowy beam,
Watching the blossoms of the May
Weep leaves into the stream.

I wept for memory;
She sang for hope that is so fair;—
My tears were swallowed by the sea;
Her songs died on the air.

Part II

I

RATHER more than a year had elapsed since Maude parted from her cousins; and now she was expecting their arrival in London every minute: for Mrs. Clifton, unable to leave her young family, had gratefully availed herself of Mrs. Foster's offer to receive Agnes and Mary during the early winter months, that they might take music and dancing lessons with their cousin.

At length the rumbling of an approaching cab was heard; then a

loud knock and ring. Maude started up; but instead of running out to meet her guests, began poking vigorously at the fire, which soon sent a warm, cheerful light through the apartment, enabling her, when they entered, to discern that Agnes had a more womanly air than at their last meeting, that Mary had outgrown her sister, and that both were remarkably good-looking.

"First let me show you your room, and then you can settle comfortably to tea; we are not to wait for mamma. She thought you would not mind sleeping together, as our house is so small; and I have done my best to arrange things to your taste, for I know of old you have only one

taste between you. Look, my room is next yours, so we can help each other very cosily: only pray do n't think of unpacking now: there will be plenty of time this evening, and you must be famished: come."

But Agnes lingered still, eager to thank her cousin for the good-natured forethought which had robbed her own apartment of flower-vases, and inkstand for the accommodation of her guests. The calls of Mary's appetite were, however, imperious; and very soon the sisters were snugly settled on a sofa by the fire, while Maude in a neighbouring armchair made tea.

"How long it seems since my birthday party," said Mary, as soon as

the eatables had in some measure restored her social powers. "Why, Maude, you are grown quite a woman, but you look more delicate than ever, and very thin; do you still write verses?" Then without waiting for a reply: "Those which you gave Miss Savage for her album were very much admired; and Magdalen Ellis wished at the time for an autograph copy, only she had not the courage to trouble you. But perhaps you are not aware that poor Magdalen has done with albums and such like, at least for the present: she has entered on her novitiate in the Sisterhood of Mercy established near our house."

"Why poor?" said Maude. "I think she is very happy."

"Surely you would not like such a life," rejoined her cousin: "they have not proper clothes on their beds, and never go out without a thick veil, which must half blind them. All day long they are at prayers, or teaching children, or attending the sick, or making poor things, or something. Is that to your taste?"

Maude half sighed, and then answered: "You cannot imagine me either fit or inclined for such a life; still, I can perceive that those are very happy who are. When I was preparing for confirmation Mr. Paulson offered me a district; but I did not like the trouble, and mamma thought me too unwell for regularity. I have regretted it since, though: yet

I do n't fancy I ever could have talked to the poor people or done the slightest good. Yes, I continue to write now and then as the humour seizes me; and if Miss Ellis—"

"Sister Magdalen," whispered Agnes.

"If Sister Magdalen will accept it, I will try and find her something admissible even within convent walls. But let us change the subject. On Thursday we are engaged to tea at Mrs. Strawdy's. There will be no sort of party, so we need not dress or take any trouble."

"Will my aunt go with us?" asked Agnes.

"No. Poor mamma has been ailing for some time and is by no

means strong; so as Mrs. Strawdy is an old schoolfellow of hers, and a most estimable person, she thinks herself justified in consigning you to my guardianship. On Saturday we must go shopping, as Aunt Letty says you are to get your winter things in London; and I can get mine at the same time. On Sunday—or does either of you dislike cathedral services?"

Agnes declared they were her delight; and Mary, who had never attended any, expressed great pleasure at the prospect of hearing what her sister preferred to all secular music.

"Very well," continued Maude; "we will go to St. Andrew's then,

and you shall be introduced to a perfect service; or at any rate to perhaps the nearest English approach to vocal perfection. But you know you are to be quite at home here; so we have not arranged any particular plans of amusement, but mean to treat you like ourselves. And now it is high time for you to retire. Here, Agnes," handing to her cousin a folded paper, the result of a rummage in her desk; "will you enclose this to Sister Magdalen, and assure her that my verses are honoured even in my own eyes by her acceptance. You can read them if you like, and Mary too, of course; only please not in my presence."

They were as follows:

Sweet, sweet sound of distant waters falling
On a parched and thirsty plain;
Sweet, sweet song of soaring skylark, calling
On the sun to shine again;
Perfume of the rose, only the fresher
For past fertilizing rain;
Pearls amid the sea, a hidden treasure
For some daring hand to gain:—
Better, dearer than all these
Is the earth beneath the trees.
Of a much more priceless worth
Is the old, brown, common earth.

Little snow-white lamb, piteously bleating
For thy mother far away;
Saddest, sweetest nightingale retreating
With thy sorrow from the day;
Weary fawn whom night has overtaken,
From the herd gone quite astray;

Dove whose nest was rifled and forsaken
In the budding month of May: —
Roost upon the leafy trees,
Lie on earth and take your ease:
Death is better far than birth,
You shall turn again to earth.

Listen to the never-pausing murmur
Of the waves that fret the shore;
See the ancient pine that stands the firmer
For the storm-shock that it bore;
And the moon her silver chalice filling
With light from the great sun's store;
And the stars which deck our temple's ceiling
As the flowers deck its floor;
Look and hearken while you may,
For these things shall pass away:
All these things shall fail and cease;
Let us wait the end in peace.

Let us wait the end in peace; for truly
That shall cease which was before:
Let us see our lamps are lighted, duly
Fed with oil, nor wanting more:
Let us pray while yet the Lord will hear us,
For the time is almost o'er;
Yea, the end of all is very near us;
Yea, the Judge is at the door.
Let us pray now, while we may;
It will be too late to pray
When the quick and dead shall all
Rise at the last trumpet-call.

II

WHEN Thursday arrived Agnes and Mary were indisposed with colds; so Mrs. Foster insisted on her daughter's making their excuses to Mrs. Strawdy. In a dismal frame of mind, Maude, assisted by her sympathizing cousins, performed her slight preliminary toilet.

"You have no notion of the utter dreariness of this kind of invitation: I counted on your helping me through the evening, and now you fail me. Thank you, Mary; I shall not waste eau de Cologne on my handkerchief.

Good-night, both: mind you go to bed early, and get up quite well to-morrow. Good-night."

The weather was foggy and raw as Maude stepped into the street; and proved anything but soothing to a temper already fretted; so by the time that she had arrived at her destination, removed her walking-things, saluted her hostess, and apologised for her cousins, her countenance had assumed an expression neither pleased nor pleasing.

"Let me present my nieces to you, my dear," said Mrs. Strawdy, taking her young friend by the hand and leading her towards the fire: "This is Miss Mowbray; or, as you must call her, Annie; that is Caro-

line, and that Sophy. They have heard so much of you that any farther introduction is needless"; here Maude bowed rather stiffly: "but as we are early people you will excuse our commencing with tea, after which we shall have leisure for amusement."

There was something so genuinely kind and simple in Mrs. Strawdy's manner, that even Maude felt mollified, and resolved on doing her best not only towards suppressing all appearance of yawns, but also towards bearing her part in the conversation.

"My cousins will regret their indisposition more than ever, when they learn of how much pleasure it has

deprived them," said she, civilly addressing Miss Mowbray.

A polite bend, smile, and murmur formed the sole response, and once more a subject had to be started.

"Have you been very gay lately? I begin to acquire the reputation of an invalid, and so my privacy is respected."

Annie coloured, and looked excessively embarrassed; at last she answered in a low, hesitating voice: "We go out extremely little, partly because we never dance."

"Nor I, either; it really is too fatiguing; yet a ball-room is no bad place for a mere spectator. Perhaps, though, you prefer the theatre?"

"We never go to the play," re-

joined Miss Mowbray looking more and more uncomfortable.

Maude ran on: "Oh, I beg your pardon, you do not approve of such entertainments. I never go, but only for want of some one to take me." Then addressing Mrs. Mowbray: "I think you know my aunt, Mrs. Clifton?"

"I visited her years ago with your mamma," was the answer: "when you were quite a little child. I hope she continues in good health. Pray remember me to her and to Mr. Clifton when you write."

"With pleasure. She has a large family now, eight children."

"That is indeed a large family," rejoined Mrs. Strawdy, intent mean-

while on dissecting a cake with mathematical precision. "You must try a piece; it is Sophy's own manufacture."

Despairing of success in this quarter, Maude now directed her attention to Caroline, whose voice she had not heard once in the course of the evening.

"I hope you will favour us with some music after tea; in fact, I can take no denial. You look too blooming to plead a cold, and I feel certain you will not refuse to indulge my love for sweet sounds. Of your ability to do so, I have heard elsewhere."

"I shall be most happy, only you must favour us in return."

"I will do my best," answered Maude somewhat encouraged; "but my own performances are very poor. Are you fond of German songs? they form my chief resource."

"Yes, I like them much."

Baffled in this quarter also, Miss Foster wanted courage to attack Sophy, whose countenance promised more cake than conversation. The meal seemed endless; she fidgetted under the table with her fingers; pushed about a stool on the noiselessly soft carpet until it came in contact with some one's foot; and at last fairly deprived Caroline of her third cup of coffee, by opening the piano and claiming the fulfillment of her promise.

The young lady complied with obliging readiness. She sang some simple airs, mostly religious, not indeed with much expression, but in a voice clear and warbling as a bird's. Maude felt consoled for all the contrarieties of the day; and was bargaining for one more song before taking Caroline's place at the instrument when the door opened to admit Mrs. and Miss Savage; who, having only just reached town, and hearing from Mrs. Foster that her daughter was at the house of a mutual friend, resolved on begging the hospitality of Mrs. Strawdy, and renewing their acquaintance.

Poor Maude's misfortunes now came thick and fast. Seated between

Miss Savage and Sophia Mowbray she was attacked on either hand with questions concerning her verses. In the first place, did she continue to write? Yes. A flood of ecstatic compliments followed this admission; she was so young, so much admired, and, poor thing, looked so delicate. It was quite affecting to think of her lying awake at night meditating those sweet verses — ("I sleep like a top," Maude put in dryly) — which so delighted her friends, and would so charm the public, if only Miss Foster could be induced to publish. At last the bystanders were called upon to intercede for a recitation.

Maude coloured with displeasure; a hasty answer was rising to her lips

when the absurdity of her position flashed across her mind so forcibly that, almost unable to check a laugh in the midst of her annoyance, she put her handkerchief to her mouth. Miss Savage, impressed with a notion that her request was about to be complied with, raised her hand, imploring silence, and settled herself in a listening attitude.

"You will excuse me," Maude at last said very coldly. "I could not think of monopolising every one's attention. Indeed you are extremely good, but you must excuse me." And here Mrs. Savage interposed, desiring her daughter not to tease Miss Foster; and Mrs. Strawdy seconded her friend's arguments by a

hint that supper would make its appearance in a few minutes.

Finally the maid announced that Miss Foster was fetched; and Maude, shortening her adieus and turning a deaf ear to Annie's suggestion that their acquaintance should not terminate with the first meeting, returned home dissatisfied with her circumstances, her friends, and herself.

III

IT was Christmas Eve. All day long Maude and her cousins were hard at work putting up holly and mistletoe in wreaths, festoons, or bunches, wherever the arrangement of the rooms admitted of such embellishment. The picture-frames were hidden behind foliage and bright berries; the bird-cages were stuck as full of green as though it had been summer. A fine sprig of holly was set apart as a centre-bit for the pudding of next day: scratched hands and injured gowns were disregarded: hour after

hour the noisy bustle raged until Mrs. Foster, hunted from place to place by her young relatives, heard, with inward satisfaction, that the decorations were completed.

After tea Mary set the backgammon board in array and challenged her aunt to their customary evening game: Maude, complaining of a headache, and promising either to wrap herself in a warm shawl or to go to bed, went to her room: and Agnes, listening to the rattle of the dice, at last came to the conclusion that her presence was not needed downstairs, and resolved to visit the upper regions. Thinking that her cousin was lying down tired and might have fallen asleep, she forebore

knocking, but opened the door softly and peeped in.

Maude was seated at a table, surrounded by the old chaos of stationery; before her lay the locking manuscript book, into which she had just copied something. That day she had appeared more than usually animated, and now supporting her forehead upon her hand, her eyes cast down till the long lashes nearly rested upon her cheeks, she looked pale, languid, almost in pain. She did not move, but let her visitor come close to her without speaking. Agnes thought she was crying.

"Dear Maude, you have overtired yourself. Indeed, for all our sakes, you should be more careful": here

Agnes passed her arm affectionately round her friend's neck: "I hoped to find you fast asleep, and instead of this you have been writing in the cold. Still, I did not come to lecture; and am even ready to show my forgiving disposition by reading your new poem: may I?"

Maude glanced quickly up at her cousin's kind face, then answered: "Yes, if you like"; and Agnes read as follows:

Vanity of vanities, the Preacher saith,
All things are vanity. The eye and ear
Cannot be filled with what they see and hear:
Like early dew, or like the sudden breath
Of wind, or like the grass that withereth,

Is man, tossed to and fro by hope and fear:
So little joy hath he, so little cheer,
  Till all things end in the long dust of death.
To-day is still the same as yesterday,
  To-morrow also even as one of them;
And there is nothing new under the sun.
Until the ancient race of time be run,
  The old thorns shall grow out of the old stem;
And morning shall be cold and twilight grey.

This sonnet was followed by another, written like a postscript.

  I listen to the holy antheming
That riseth in thy walls continually,
What while the organ pealeth solemnly
  And white-robed men and boys stand up to sing.
  I ask my heart with a sad questioning:

"What lov'st thou here?" and my heart answers me:
"Within the shadows of this sanctuary
To watch and pray is a most blessed thing."
To watch and pray, false heart? it is not so:
Vanity enters with thee, and thy love
Soars not to heaven, but grovelleth below.
Vanity keepeth guard, lest good should reach
Thy hardness; not the echoes from above
Can rule thy stubborn feelings or can teach —

"Was this composed after going to St. Andrew's?"

"No; I wrote it just now, but I was thinking of St. Andrew's. It is

horrible to feel such a hypocrite as I do."

"Oh! Maude, I only wish I were as sensible of my faults as you are of yours. But a hypocrite you are not: do n't you see that every line of these sonnets attests your sincerity?"

"You will stay to Communion to-morrow?" asked Maude after a short silence, and without replying to her cousin's speech; even these few words seemed to cost her an effort.

"Of course I shall: why, it is Christmas day:— at least I trust to do so. Mary and I have been thinking how nice it will be for us all to receive together: so I want you to

promise that you will pray for us at the altar, as I shall for you. Will you ?"

"I shall not receive to-morrow," answered Maude; then hurrying on as if to prevent the other from remonstrating: "No: at least I will not profane holy things; I will not add this to all the rest. I have gone over and over again, thinking I should come right in time, and I do not come right: I will go no more."

Agnes turned quite pale: "Stop," she said, interrupting her cousin: "Stop; you cannot mean — you do not know what you are saying. You will go no more? Only think, if the struggle is so hard now, what it will be when you reject all help."

"I do not struggle."

"You are ill to-night," rejoined Agnes very gently, "you are tired and over-excited. Take my advice, dear; say your prayers and get to bed. But do not be very long; if there is anything you miss and will tell me of, I will say it in your stead. Do n't think me unfeeling. I was once on the very point of acting as you propose. I was perfectly wretched: harassed and discouraged on all sides. But then it struck me —you won't be angry?—that it was so ungrateful to follow my own fancies, instead of at least endeavouring to do God's will; and so foolish, too; for if our safety is not in obedience, where is it?"

Maude shook her head: "Your case is different. Whatever your faults may be (not that I perceive any), you are trying to correct them; your own conscience tells you that. But I am not trying. No one will say that I cannot avoid putting myself forward and displaying my verses. Agnes, you must admit so much."

Deep-rooted, indeed, was that vanity which made Maude take pleasure on such an occasion in proving the force of arguments directed against herself. Still Agnes would not yield, but resolutely did battle for the truth.

"If hitherto it has been so, let it be so no more. It is not too late:

besides, think for one moment what will be the end of this. We must all die: what if you keep to your resolution, and do as you have said, and receive the Blessed Sacrament no more?" Her eyes filled with tears.

Maude's answer came in a subdued tone: "I do not mean never to communicate again. You remember Mr. Paulson told us last Sunday that sickness and suffering are sent for our correction. I suffer very much. Perhaps a time will come when these will have done their work on me also; when I shall be purified indeed and weaned from the world. Who knows? the lost have been found, the dead quick-

ened." She paused as if in thought; then continued: "You partake of the Blessed Sacrament in peace, Agnes, for you are good; and Mary, for she is harmless: but your conduct cannot serve to direct mine, because I am neither the one nor the other. Some day I may be fit again to approach the Holy Altar, but till then I will at least refrain from dishonouring it."

Agnes felt almost indignant. "Maude, how can you talk so? this is not reverence. You cannot mean that for the present you will indulge vanity and display; that you will court admiration and applause; that you will take your fill of pleasure until sickness, or it may be death,

strips you of temptation and sin together. Forgive me; I am sure you never meant this: yet what else does a deliberate resolution to put off doing right come to?—and if you are determined at once to do your best, why deprive yourself of the appointed means of grace? Dear Maude, think better of it"; and Agnes knelt beside her cousin, and laid her head against her bosom.

But still Maude, with a sort of desperate wilfulness, kept saying: "It is of no use; I cannot go tomorrow; it is of no use." She hid her face, leaning upon the table and weeping bitterly; while Agnes, almost discouraged, quitted the room.

Maude, once more alone, sat for

some time just as her cousin left her. Gradually the thick, low sobs became more rare; she was beginning to feel sleepy. At last she roused herself with an effort and commenced undressing; then it struck her that her prayers had still to be said. The idea of beginning them frightened her; yet she could not settle to sleep without saying something. Strange prayers they must have been, offered with a divided heart and a reproachful conscience. Still they were said at length; and Maude lay down harassed, wretched, remorseful, everything but penitent. She was nearly asleep, nearly unconscious of her troubles, when the first strokes of midnight sounded.

Immediately a party of Christmas waits and carollers burst forth with their glad music. The first part was sung in full chorus:

"Thank God, thank God, we do believe,
Thank God that this is Christmas Eve.
Even as we kneel upon this day,
Even so the ancient legends say,
Nearly two thousand years ago
The stalled ox knelt, and even so
The ass knelt, full of praise, which they
Could not repress, while we can pray.
Thank God, thank God, for Christ
was born
Ages ago, as on this morn.
In the snow-season undefiled
Christ came to earth a Little Child:
He put His ancient Glory by
To live for us and then to die."

Then half the voices sang the following stanza:

"How shall we thank God? how shall we
Thank Him and praise Him worthily?
What will He have Who loved us thus?
What presents will He take from us?
Will He take Gold? or precious heap
Of gems? or shall we rather steep
The air with incense? or bring myrrh?
What man will be our messenger
To go to Him and ask His Will?
Which having learned, we will fulfil,
Though He choose all we most prefer:
What man will be our messenger?"

This was answered by the other half:

"Thank God, thank God, the Man is found,
Sure-footed, knowing well the ground.
He knows the road, for this the way

He travelled once, as on this day.
He is our Messenger ; beside,
He is our Door and Path and Guide ;
He also is our Offering ;
He is the Gift. That we must bring—"

Finally all the singers joined in the conclusion :

"Let us kneel down with one accord
And render thanks unto the Lord.
For unto us a Child is born
Upon this happy Christmas morn ;
For unto us a Son is given,
First-born of God and Heir of Heaven."

As the echoes died away, Maude fell asleep.

Part III

I

Agnes Clifton to Maude Foster.

12th June, 18—.

My Dear Maude,—

MAMMA has written to my aunt that Mary's marriage is fixed for the 4th of next month: but as I fear we cannot expect you both so many days before the time, I also write, hoping that you at least will come without delay. At any rate, I shall be at the station to-morrow afternoon with a chaise for your luggage, so pray take pity on my desolate condition, and avail yourself of the three-

o'clock train. As we are both bridesmaids-elect, I thought it would be very nice for us to be dressed alike, so have procured double quantity of everything; thus you will perceive no pretence remains for your lingering in smoky London.

You will be amused when you see Mary: I have already lost my companion. Mr. Herbert calls at least once a day, but sometimes oftener; so all day long Mary is on the alert. She takes much more interest in the roses over the porch than was formerly the case; the creepers outside the windows require continual training, not to say hourly care. I tell her the constitution of the garden must have become seriously weak-

ened lately. One morning I caught her before the glass, trying the effect of syringa (the English orange-blossom, you know) in her hair. She looked such a darling. I hinted how flattered Mr. Herbert would feel when I told him; which provoked her to offer a few remarks on old maids. Was it not a shame?

Last Thursday Magdalen Ellis was finally received into the Sisterhood of Mercy. I wished much to be present, but could not, as the whole affair was conducted quite privately; only her parents were admitted of the world. However, I made interest for a lock of her beautiful hair, which I prize highly. It makes me sad to look at it; yet I know she has

chosen well, and will, if she perseveres, receive hereafter an abundant recompense for all she has foregone here. Sometimes I think whether such a life can be suited to me; but then I could not bear to leave mamma: indeed that is just what Magdalen felt so much. I met her yesterday walking with some poor children. Her veil was down, nearly hiding her face; still I fancy she looked thoughtful, but very calm and happy. She says she always prays for me, and asked my prayers; so I begged her to remember you and Mary. Then she enquired how you are, desiring her kindest love to you, and assuring me she makes no doubt your name will be known at some future period;

but checking herself almost immediately, she added that she could fancy you very different as pale Sister Maude. This surprised me; I can fancy nothing of the sort. At last she mentioned the verses you gave her months ago, which she knows by heart and values extremely: then, having nearly reached my home, we parted.

What a document I have composed; I, who have not one minute to spare from Mary's trousseau. Will you give my love to my aunt, and request her from me to permit your immediately coming to

Your affectionate cousin,

AGNES M. CLIFTON.

P.S.—Mary would doubtless send

a message were she in the room; I conjecture her to be lurking about somewhere on the watch. Good-bye: or rather, come.

Maude handed the letter to her mother: "Can you spare me, mamma? I should like to go, but not if it is to inconvenience you."

"Certainly, you shall go, my dear. It is a real pleasure to hear you express interest on some point, and you cannot be with any one I approve of more than Agnes. But you must make haste with the packing now: I will come and help you in a few minutes."

Still Maude lingered.

"Did you see about Magdalen?

I wonder what made her think of me as a sister. It is very nice of her; but then she is so good she never can conceive what I am like. Mamma, should you mind my being a nun?"

"Yes, my dear, it would make me miserable. But for the present take my advice and hurry a little, or the train will leave without you."

Thus urged, Maude proceeded to bundle various miscellaneous goods into a trunk; the only article on the safety of which she bestowed much thought being the present destined for Mary; a sofa-pillow worked in glowing shades of wool and silk. This she wrapped carefully in a cloth and laid at the bottom; then

over it all else was heaped without much ceremony. Many were the delays occasioned by things mislaid, which must be looked for; ill-secured, which must be re-arranged; or remembered too late, which yet could not be dispensed with, and so must be crammed in somewhere. At length, however, the tardy preparations were completed; and Maude, enveloped in two shawls, though it was the height of summer, stepped into a cab, promising strict conformity to her mother's injunction that both windows should be kept closed.

Half an hour had not elapsed when another cab drove up to the door, and out of it Maude was lifted

perfectly insensible. She had been overturned, and though no limb was broken, had neither stirred nor spoken since the accident.

II

Maude Foster to Agnes Clifton.

2nd July, 18—

My Dear Agnes,—

YOU have heard of my mishap? it keeps me, not bedridden, but sofa-ridden. My side is dreadfully hurt; I looked at it this morning for the first time, but hope never again to see so shocking a sight. The pain now and then is extreme, though not always so; sometimes, in fact, I am unconscious of any injury.

Will you convey my best love and wishes to Mary, and tell her how

much I regret being away from her at such a time, especially as mamma will not hear of leaving me. A day or two ago I tried to compose an epithalamium for our fair fiancée; which effort resulted in my present enclosure: not much to the purpose, we must admit. You may read it when no better employment offers. The first Nun no one can suspect of being myself, partly because my hair is far from yellow and I do not wear curls, partly because I never did anything half so good as profess. The second might be Mary, had she mistaken her vocation. The third is Magdalen, of course. But whatever you miss, pray read the mottoes. Put together, they form a most ex-

quisite little song which the nuns sing in Italy. One can fancy Sister Magdalen repeating it with her whole heart.

The surgeon comes twice a day to dress my wounds; still all the burden of nursing falls on poor mamma. How I wish you were here to help us both; we should find plenty to say.

But perhaps ere many months are passed I shall be up and about, when we may go together on a visit to Mary; a most delightful possibility. By the way, how I should love a baby of hers, and what a pretty little creature it ought to be. Do you think Mr. Herbert handsome? hitherto I have only heard a partial opinion.

Uh, my side! it gives an awful twinge now and then. You need not read my letter; but I must write it, for I am unable to do anything else. Did the pillow reach safely? It gave me so much pleasure to work it for Mary, who, I hope, likes it. At all events, if not to her taste, she may console herself with the reflection that it is unique; for the pattern was my own designing.

Here comes dinner; good-bye. When will anything so welcome as your kind face gladden the eyes of

Your affectionate

MAUDE FOSTER?

P.S.—I have turned tippler lately on port wine, three times a day. "To keep you up," says my doctor:

while I obstinately refuse to be kept up, but insist on becoming weaker and weaker. Mind you write me a full history of your grand doings on a certain occasion; not omitting a detailed account of the lovely bride, her appearance, deportment, and toilet. Good-bye once more: when shall I see you all again?

THREE NUNS

I

"Sospira questo core
E non sadir perchè."

Shadow, shadow on the wall,
Spread thy shelter over me;
Wrap me with a heavy pall,
With the dark that none may see.
Fold thyself around me; come:
Shut out all the troublesome
Noise of life; I would be dumb.

Shadow, thou hast reached my feet,
  Rise and cover up my head;
Be my stainless winding-sheet,
  Buried before I am dead.
Lay thy cool upon my breast:
Once I thought that joy was best,
Now I only care for rest.

By the grating of my cell
  Sings a solitary bird:
Sweeter than the vesper bell,
  Sweetest song was ever heard.*
Sing upon thy living tree:
Happy echoes answer thee,
Happy songster, sing to me.

When my yellow hair was curled
  Though men saw and called me fair,
I was weary in the world,
  Full of vanity and care.

* "Sweetest eyes were ever seen." — E. B. Browning.

Gold was left behind, curls shorn
When I came here; that same morn
Made a bride no gems adorn.

Here wrapped in my spotless veil,
  Curtained from intruding eyes,
I whom prayers and fasts turn pale
  Wait the flush of Paradise.
But the vigil is so long
My heart sickens — sing thy song,
Blithe bird that canst do no wrong.

Sing on, making me forget
  Present sorrow and past sin;
Sing a little longer yet:
  Soon the matins will begin:
And I must turn back again
To that aching worse than pain
I must bear and not complain.

Sing, that in thy song I may
  Dream myself once more a child

In the green woods far away
  Plucking clematis and wild
Hyacinths, till pleasure grew
Tired, yet so was pleasure too,
Resting with no work to do.

In the thickest of the wood
  I remember, long ago
How a stately oak-tree stood
  With a sluggish pool below,
Almost shadowed out of sight.
On the waters dark as night,
Water-lilies lay like light.

There, while yet a child I thought
  I could live as in a dream,
Secret, neither found nor sought:
  Till the lilies on the stream,
Pure as virgin purity,
Would seem scarce too pure for me:
Ah, but that can never be.

II.

"Sospirera d'amore
Ma non lodice a me."

I loved him, yes, where was the sin?
I loved him with my heart and soul,
But I pressed forward to no goal,
There was no prize I strove to win.
Show me my sin that I may see:—
Throw the first stone, thou Pharisee.

I loved him, but I never sought
That he should know that I was fair.
I prayed for him; was my sin prayer?
I sacrificed, he never bought.
He nothing gave, he nothing took;
We never bartered look for look.

My voice rose in the sacred choir,
The choir of Nuns; do you condemn
Even if, when kneeling among them,

Faith, zeal, and love kindled a fire,
And I prayed for his happiness
Who knew not? was my error this?

I only prayed that in the end,
  His trust and hope may not be vain.
  I prayed not we may meet again:
I would not let our names ascend,
No, not to Heaven, in the same breath;
Nor will I join the two in death.

Oh sweet is death, for I am weak
  And weary, and it giveth rest.
  The Crucifix lies on my breast,
And all night long it seems to speak
Of rest; I hear it through my sleep,
And the great comfort makes me weep.

Oh sweet is death that bindeth up
  The broken and the bleeding heart.
  The draught chilled but a cordial part

Lurked at the bottom of the cup,
And for my patience will my Lord
Give an exceeding great reward.

Yea, the reward is almost won,
A crown of glory and a palm.
Soon I shall sing the unknown psalm;
Soon gaze on light, not on the sun;
And soon, with surer faith, shall pray
For him, and cease not night nor day.

My life is breaking like a cloud;
God judgeth not as man doth judge—
Nay, bear with me; you need not grudge
This peace; the vows that I have vowed
Have all been kept; Eternal Strength
Holds me, though mine own fails at length.

Bury me in the Convent ground
Among the flowers that are so sweet;
And lay a green turf at my feet

Where thick trees cast a gloom around.
At my head let a Cross be, white
Through the long blackness of the night.

Now kneel and pray beside my bed
  That I may sleep being free from pain:
  And pray that I may wake again
After His Likeness, Who hath said
(Faithful is He Who promiseth),
We shall be satisfied Therewith.

III

"Rispondimi, cor mio,
Perchè sospiri tu?
Risponde: Voglio Iddio,
Sospiro per Gesù."

My heart is as a free-born bird
  Caged in my cruel breast,
That flutters, flutters evermore,
  Nor sings, nor is at rest.

But beats against the prison bars,
  As knowing its own nest
  Far off beyond the clouded West.

My soul is as a hidden fount
  Shut in by clammy clay,
That struggles with an upward moan;
  Striving to force its way
Up through the turf, over the grass,
  Up, up into the day,
  Where twilight no more turneth grey.

Oh for the grapes of the True Vine
  Growing in Paradise,
Whose tendrils join the Tree of Life
  To that which maketh wise.
Growing beside the Living Well,
  Whose sweetest waters rise,
  Where tears are wiped from tearful
    eyes.

Oh for the waters of that Well
  Round which the Angels stand;
Oh for the Shadow of the Rock
  On my heart's weary land.
Oh for the Voice to guide me when
  I turn to either hand,
  Guiding me till I reach Heaven's
    strand.

Thou World from which I am come out,
  Keep all thy gems and gold;
Keep thy delights and precious things
  Thou that art waxing old,
My heart shall beat with a new life,
  When thine is dead and cold;
  When thou dost fear I shall be bold.

When Earth shall pass away with all
  Her pride and pomp of sin,
The City builded without hands
  Shall safely shut me in.

All the rest is but vanity
  Which others strive to win:
  Where their hopes end my joys begin.

I will not look upon a rose,
  Though it is fair to see,
The flowers planted in Paradise
  Are budding now for me.
Red roses like love visible
  Are blowing on their tree,
  Or white like virgin purity.

I will not look unto the sun
  Which setteth night by night,
In the untrodden courts of Heaven
  My crown shall be more bright.
So, in the New Jerusalem,
  Founded and built aright,
  My very feet shall tread on light.

With foolish riches of this world
  I have bought treasure, where

Naught perisheth: for this white veil
I gave my golden hair,
I gave the beauty of my face
For vigils, fasts, and prayer;
I gave all for this Cross I bear.

My heart trembled when first I took
The vows which must be kept;
At first it was a weariness
To watch when once I slept.
The path was rough and sharp with thorns;
My feet bled as I stepped;
The Cross was heavy and I wept.

While still the names rang in mine ears
Of daughter, sister, wife,
The outside world still looked so fair
To my weak eyes and rife
With beauty, my heart almost failed;
Then in the desperate strife
I prayed, as one who prays for life,

Until I grew to love what once
  Had been so burdensome.
So now when I am faint, because
  Hope deferred seems to numb
My heart, I yet can plead; and say
  Although my lips are dumb:
"The Spirit and the Bride say, Come."

III

THREE weeks had passed away. A burning sun seemed baking the very dust in the streets, and sucking the last remnant of moisture from the straw spread in front of Mrs. Foster's house, when the sound of a low, muffled ring was heard in the sick-room; and Maude, now entirely confined to her bed, raising herself on one arm, looked eagerly towards the door; which opened to admit a servant with the welcome announcement that Agnes had arrived.

After tea Mrs. Foster, almost

worn out with fatigue, went to bed; leaving her daughter under the care of their guest. The first greetings between the cousins had passed sadly enough. Agnes perceived at a glance that Maude was, as her last letter hinted, in a most alarming state: while the sick girl, well aware of her condition, received her friend with an emotion which showed she felt it might be for the last time. But soon her spirits rallied.

"I shall enjoy our evening together so much, Agnes"; said she, speaking now quite cheerfully: "You must tell me all the news. Have you heard from Mary since your last despatch to me?"

"Mamma received a letter this

morning before I set off; and she sent it, hoping to amuse you. Shall I read it aloud?"

"No, let me have it myself." Her eye travelled rapidly down the well-filled pages, comprehending at a glance all the tale of happiness. Mr. and Mrs. Herbert were at Scarborough; they would thence proceed to the Lakes; and thence, most probably, homewards, though a prolonged tour was mentioned as just possible. But both plans seemed alike pleasing to Mary, for she was full of her husband, and both were equally connected with him.

Maude smiled as paragraph after paragraph enlarged on the same topic. At last she said: "Agnes, if

you could not be yourself, but must become one of us three: I do n't mean as to goodness, of course, but merely as regards circumstances,—would you change with Sister Magdalen, with Mary, or with me?"

"Not with Mary, certainly. Neither should I have courage to change with you; I never should bear pain so well: nor yet with Sister Magdalen, for I want her fervour of devotion. So at present I fear you must even put up with me as I am. Will that do?"

There was a pause. A fresh wind had sprung up and the sun was setting.

At length Maude resumed: "Do you recollect last Christmas Eve

when I was so wretched, what shocking things I said? How I rejoice that my next Communion was not, indeed, delayed till sickness had stripped me of temptation and sin together."

"Did I say that? It was very harsh."

"Not harsh: it was just and right as far as it went, only something more was required. But I never told you what altered me. The truth is, for a time I avoided as much as possible frequenting our parish church, for fear of remark. Mamma, knowing how I love St. Andrew's, let me go there very often by myself, because the walk is too long for her. I wanted resolution to do right, yet

believe me I was very miserable: how I could say my prayers at that period is a mystery. So matters went on; till one day as I was returning from a shop, I met Mr. Paulson. He enquired immediately whether I had been staying in the country? Of course I answered, No. Had I been ill? again, No. Then gradually the whole story came out. I never shall forget the shame of my admissions, each word seemed forced from me, yet at last all was told. I will not repeat all we said then, and on a subsequent occasion when he saw me at church, the end was that I partook of the Holy Communion on Easter Sunday. That was indeed a feast. I felt as if I

never could do wrong again, and yet —well, after my next impatient fit, I wrote this." Here she took a paper from the table: "Do you care to see it? I will rest a little, for talking is almost too much for me."

I watched a rosebud very long
  Brought on by dew and sun and shower,
  Waiting to see the perfect flower:
Then when I thought it should be strong,
  It opened at the matin hour
    And fell at evensong.

I watched a nest from day to day,
  A green nest, full of pleasant shade,
  Wherein three little eggs were laid:
But when they should have hatched in May,
  The two old birds had grown afraid,
    Or tired, and flew away.

Then in my wrath I broke the bough
That I had tended with such care,
Hoping its scent should fill the air:
I crushed the eggs, not heeding how
Their ancient promise had been fair: —
I would have vengeance now.

But the dead branch spoke from the sod,
And the eggs answered me again:
Because we failed dost thou complain?
Is thy wrath just? And what if God,
Who waiteth for thy fruits in vain,
Should also take the rod?

"You can keep it if you like," continued Maude, when her cousin had finished reading: "Only do n't let any one else know why it was written. And, Agnes, it would only pain mamma to look over everything if I die; will you examine the verses,

and destroy what I evidently never intended to be seen. They might all be thrown away together, only mamma is so fond of them. What will she do?" and the poor girl hid her face in the pillows.

"But is there no hope, then?"

"Not the slightest, if you mean of recovery; and she does not know it. Do n't go away when all 's over, but do what you can to comfort her. I have been her misery from my birth, till now there is no time to do better. But you must leave me, please; for I feel completely exhausted. Or stay one moment: I saw Mr. Paulson again this morning, and he promised to come to-morrow to administer the Blessed Sacrament

to me; so I count on you and mamma receiving with me, for the last time perhaps: will you?"

"Yes, dear Maude. But you are so young, do n't give up hope. And now would you like me to remain here during the night? I can establish myself quite comfortably on your sofa."

"Thank you, but it could only make me restless. Good-night, my own dear Agnes."

"Good-night, dear Maude. I trust to rise early to-morrow, that I may be with you all the sooner." So they parted.

Agnes proceeded to perform the task imposed upon her, with scrupulous anxiety to carry out her friend's

wishes. The locked book she never opened, but had it placed on Maude's coffin, with all its records of folly, sin, vanity, and, she humbly trusted, of true penitence also. She next collected the scraps of paper found in her cousin's desk and portfolio, or lying loose upon the table, and proceeded to examine them. Many of these were mere fragments, many half-effaced pencil scrawls, and some written on torn backs of letters, and some full of incomprehensible abbreviations. Agnes was astonished at the variety of Maude's compositions. Piece after piece she committed to the flames, fearful lest any should be preserved which were not intended for general perusal: but it cost her a

pang to do so; and to see how small a number remained for Mrs. Foster. Of three only she took copies for herself. The first was dated ten days after Maude's accident:

Sleep, let me sleep, for I am sick of care;
Sleep, let me sleep, for my pain wearies me.
Shut out the light; thicken the heavy air
With drowsy incense; let a distant stream
Of music lull me, languid as a dream
Soft as the whisper of a Summer sea.

Pluck me no rose that groweth on a thorn,
No myrtle white and cold as snow in June,

Fit for a virgin on her marriage morn:
But bring me poppies brimmed with sleepy death,
And ivy choking what it garlandeth,
And primroses that open to the moon.

Listen, the music swells into a song,
A simple song I loved in days of yore;
The echoes take it up and up along
The hills, and the wind blows it back again:—
Peace, peace, there is a memory in that strain
Of happy days that shall return no more.

Oh peace, your music wakeneth old thought,
But not old hope that made my life so sweet,
Only the longing that must end in naught.

Have patience with me, friends, a little while:
For soon where you shall dance and sing and smile,
My quickened dust may blossom at your feet.

Sweet thought that I may yet live and grow green,
That leaves may yet spring from the withered root,
And birds and flowers and berries half unseen;
Then if you haply muse upon the past,
Say this: Poor child, she hath her wish at last;
Barren through life, but in death bearing fruit.

The second, though written on the same paper, was evidently composed at a subsequent period:

Fade, tender lily,
  Fade, Oh crimson rose,
Fade every flower,
  Sweetest flower that blows.

Go, chilly Autumn,
  Come, Oh Winter cold;
Let the green stalks die away
  Into common mould.

Birth follows hard on death,
  Life on withering.
Hasten, we shall come the sooner
  Back to pleasant Spring.

The last was a sonnet, dated the morning before her death:

What is it Jesus saith unto the soul? —
"Take up the Cross and come, and follow Me."
This word he saith to all; no man may be

Without the Cross, wishing to win the goal.
Then take it bravely up, setting thy whole
Body to bear; it will not weigh on thee
Beyond thy utmost strength: take it, for He
Knoweth when thou art weak, and will control
The powers of darkness that thou needst not fear.
He will be with thee, helping, strengthening,
Until it is enough: for lo, the day
Cometh when He shall call thee: thou shall hear
His voice that says: "Winter is past, and Spring
Is come; arise, My Love, and come away."

Agnes cut one long tress from Maude's head; and on her return home laid it in the same paper with the lock of Magdalen's hair. These she treasured greatly, and, gazing on them, would long and pray for the hastening of that eternal morning, which shall reunite in God those who in Him, or for His Sake, have parted here.

Amen for us all.

THE END.

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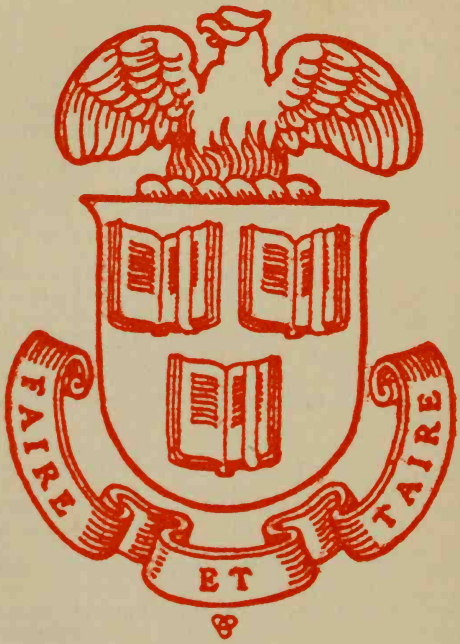
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